



Last Night Together

On The Bank of a Stream

The story is about an unfortunate, transcendental experience of a young star-crossed paramour, who was betrayed by his beloved. It was love that engulfed the life of a young talented and universally acknowledged prodigy, who perished his own life for unrequited and unreciprocated love.

MUDASSAR JAVED BARYAR



LAST NIGHT TOGETHER

(Mudassar Javed Baryar)

For more than one month I had to wait impatiently, and then I saw a tall, shabby and unkempt young boy in a long coat came hurrying across the stream irascibly. “You are not okay. Where the heck you have been so long? What the hell with you?” I asked him indignantly. I felt very happy when I saw him, because when I looked at him and saw his smile, it also made me smile. But he had been changed and prevented living his life the way he used to live. He had stopped talking to people. He kept silent for hours. He had forgotten eating and drinking. He had once made an abortive effort to commit suicide and had been rushed to the hospital immediately. I was waiting for him to say something in reply, but words had abandoned him. Then he said floppily, “I’m okay. But, man be, I’m not. I’m not happy. But I’m not sad. Most of the time, I feel confused, ashamed and afraid. I guess I’m living with the world but actually I’m not.” His voice wobbled with repressed emotions and aches.

He had gone somewhere no one knew until his presence after virtually a month’s time. I waited long for an opportunity to resume our conversation. You might imagine I grew frustrated with the wait, but you must remember: I had never in my life had long enough conversations like I had with him.

He was extremely talented and highly regarded in the village that all and sundry were quite ready to lose their of paramount importance work in order to hear what he had to say in his mind. He was always called Mani, though the name under which he had been revealed formally was Jawed, a boy gifted with a brain that can solve any riddle within a second. He was twenty eight years old and had grown rather stout and sturdy but now everything had changed astonishingly. He was a majestic-looking young man, with a wise, benevolent and compassionate appearance in spite of the fact that he had lost all that he once accumulated with hard working. But now his world had suddenly and precipitously changed altogether. He was too lean to walk and too pathetic to talk steadily, as he used to do. Now he couldn’t put his mind on things consciously and often stumbled while walking often get injured. He was now almost beyond my imagining. His twinkling eyes had turned into rather lackluster. How much he had dramatically changed altogether in the four years since she had left him!

I hope you will not think me irreverent when I say that there is the only answer to all his problems and that responsible of his this pathetic, dilapidated plight. It is summed up in a single word- Alisha. Alisha was the arch enemy he had in guise of beauty and love. If she had been removed from the scene of his wretched life, the root cause of his appalling plight would have been abolished forever. If she had gone elsewhere, he would rejoice the life as usual and would be with me sitting beside you. If he had treated her the way she treated him, she would have not stuck around the way he did till the end. She left him feeling listless, penniless and depressed, without teaching him how to forget her. Once I tried to figure out why she meant so much to him, I couldn’t think of a single one because there were just too many to be counted.

I could see that his face had hundreds observations and thousands reflections when he came back to village. He was a man of knowledge and mild tempered. He'd not learnt anything in life without experience pain. He had paid heavy price for coming to this point. He had keen observation and profound understanding of human nature. He had so much to share with me but never succeeded in doing this daunting job the way he once used to do. Whenever he tried he stammered and fell short of precise words to speak resort into deep silence, deeper than the depth of the ocean. He seldom talked now, and whenever he did, it was usually to make some philosophical remark, beyond the understanding of an ordinary intellect, however we couldn't help listening him. His infallible views were immediately picked up by young and old inevitably. For instance, he would often say, "God will never take anything away from me without intention of replacing it with something much better, more than special". Last month, by tremendous and exhausting effort, he was resolute and no sooner he started unfolding his narrative of unfortunate mishaps than suddenly fled away without telling anyone where he was going, and came after one month. He seemed to have felt that he would not be with me for many months, and before he died, he felt it his duty to pass on to me such secret as he had acquired. Such were his thoughts and feelings he was concealing in his pure heart, though he lacked the words to express them properly.

The dust had deepened into dark night but not so dark as moon was shedding his soothing rays on the stream which was running from the time immemorial. The ripples of the stream were whispering, as they came in, causing him to recall being in her arms not long ago. We both settled down on a rock immediately in front of the stream side by side, the right place where you are now squatting observantly. The sight of the stream was pleasant due to the reflection of the stars and light of the moon. It was a frosty and moonlight night of December, like this one. The erratic breeze, which, when blew, made these nights more frigid and freezing. I could see the lights of other houses twinkling in the distance along the curve of the road. The time was almost 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind grew stronger and stronger with a taste of rain in them had nearly depopled the streets. But he was drowning in his thoughts and was indifferent to the rest of his world. The weather also played its part to make him lethargy. The pangs of separation had made him apathetic to the frosty blows of chilly wind. Outward atmosphere of the night was calm and tranquil but within him a volcano was striving to erupt violently. His eyes brimmed with tears and heart was brimming over with agonizing memories of past.

He seemed to have destroyed himself utterly. The sight of the stream in the light of the moon was unparalleled. The ripples of the stream were wrestling as his emotions. He was staring incessantly at the notebook which struck me as somewhat shabby, with the tears rolling down his cheeks falling on it, so intensely that I doubted his being alive as he had become like a statue. It was bound with soft pink leather; I had previously seen it in his hand. He didn't know that the gifts of love, one of them he was fervently devoted to, were the symbols of slavery. He could not understand that the liberty (life) was worth more than millions of notebooks (love).

He was devastatingly drowning in his own thoughts. Something was so much appallingly teasing him that couldn't be controlled by the power of wit and patience. He squatted there without listening to a single word of what I was saying. It seemed he was on his own sitting there and no

one there to share his pain. I guessed correctly, he was not with me. He was thinking something else, imperceptible to me. I found myself among the mysterious creatures in the mysterious environment in the moon-lit night.

In order to prevent him from focusing on Alisha, I tried to talk but remained reluctant. He wanted to tell me everything. And that hurt because some things were too scary. Some things even he didn't understand. I didn't disturb him from the imaginary world he had invented without a single penny in his pocket.

I never saw him behaving like an ordinary individual before; rather he was a sophisticated learned and talented young man. These were not only my views about him but others also considered him as I did. "Staying quiet doesn't mean you have nothing to say. It means you don't think others are ready to hear your thoughts. Sometimes silence is the most powerful shriek and indication of something being terribly wrong happening inside. The most painful moment for a person's life is when they're falling apart inside and no one seems to notice them". Unintentionally, these were some feelings and unspoken words that emerged in my heart but I could share only a few. You too cannot understand them fully.

I was happy to be his sole confidant whenever I got chance. The few hours I spent with him were worth the thousand and million hours I spent without him. When he talked to me, the rest of the world disappeared before my eyes. He made me see things the way other could never see. He made me feel things the way others could never feel. He made me speak better than any other could. Ever since I met you, nobody else was worth thinking about. I had to solemnly confess. I never considered myself to have the same depth of character and mind he had.

He spoke listlessly in a meek fashion, "sometimes I pretend to be happy: Though I never tasted the smell of happiness. Whenever I tried to be happy, something would despicable happen and wreaked havoc on my happiness". Actually I, too, never saw him, who was formerly considered the happiest creature, happy after the breakup. He had forgotten the worth of happiness or leisure a year ago. "Even when I'm hurting so bad inside, I'll still smile and say I'm fine. Is it happiness?" He managed to say a great deal with few words. He wanted to say all that pent-up emotions that should have been expressed years ago. How could I fathom the depth of his imagination which was deeper than the deepest seas and higher than the Himalayas? The intense agonies of his past were beyond my wit and understanding. "We are all of us, growing volcanoes that approach the hour of their eruption but sometimes, it takes years and years". I often convinced him "Don't ever put your happiness in someone else's hand. They will drop it. They will drop it everytime. Don't wait for other people to make you happy. Find happiness within you and the happiness will come". He listened to me speak, with a series of sadness. I was succeeded in this to some extent that surprised me to a great extent. When I think about it now. Suffice it to say that he started to have belief on happiness. It gave me enormous satisfaction, but he didn't sound very convinced.

His mood would change a thousand times a day and no one could perceive it. Sometimes I wondered how different his life would have been if he had pronounced all the things he wanted to express, not to me, to the person he trusted the most and who was more than anything in the world. "Sometimes, no matter how much it aches, how much you need to share, you have to keep

going on with the secrets. Some things are better left unsaid. But I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions my feeling, my past. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them. But don't know how to say, what to say and who to say." this is what he often reiterated to me whenever I tried to scratch his past sharply.

Though it was night, the fire blazing in his gloomy and bruised heart seemed to glow around him like a flame. "I detest those late hours of darkness where I feel like sharing to someone and no matter how much I endeavor, I can't succeed". He said, still staring at the sky as though he was exploring something which had lost ages ago, never to be found. It was as though he had never seen sky before. "You can never understand someone's pain until you're the one who feels it. Explaining your feelings to someone is never easy". This was his dictum, which he had adopted as his personal motto and used whenever he tried to dissemble the truth; however, I always cleverly trapped him easily. At first I didn't believe him and asked if he was insane. "Don't judge me by my past at all, I don't live there anymore". He uttered these words spontaneously and imprudently when I jolted him and tried to disillusion him from the world he was cherishing by the power of imagination. He was not what he pretended to be, he was what he was not. I guessed and believed it wholeheartedly.

I would like to think that he was, at that moment, outwardly calm and serene, but inside he was shattering and panicking and gave no sign of this. He didn't seem to be with me at that moment. That moment, for him, longer than the years he had spent remembering her quietly. And his love for her was the only thing that would remain when he had died. "Stop stressing over it too much, just let it be, everything will be okay buddy, if not now, eventually. Can we go home instantly? It is perishing outside" I requested him tapping my hand on his shoulder "It seems obligatory now". But he found it hard to speak a single word, even in mild voice. It was beyond my reach to comprehend the depth of his passion and emotions that he had associated with her. He deliberately chose to love her in silence, for in silence he found no rejection. He chose to love her in his dreams, for in his dreams she was only his. He was madly in love with her but he never rejoiced it. He never tasted the sweetness of her love. When we love someone, we are not contented with knowing only the lover's soul: we also want to understand the lover's body. He never said what he wanted to be in life or to have in life, nor was it asked by the people living around him. He couldn't lose her. Because if he ever did, he'd have lost his best friend, his soul companion, his smile, his laugh, everything that was in his possession.

In order to prevent myself from disturbing him, I impolitely began to focus on the past he had lived in solitude. It may always be clear that only True Love can contest with any other love in the world. When we give everything in order not to lose our love, we have nothing more to lose. And any terror, jealousy, ennui, and monotony vanish, and all that remains is the light from a void that does not frighten us, but with him everything was different. For him, I guess, it is best to say; to love abundantly was to lose abundantly. To love forever was to lose forever. Love was the only malignant lust that consumed his spirit of living, without producing anything lucrative.

At that very moment he abruptly spoke chokingly, "why should I live anymore when there is no hope, when there is no purpose in life, when she is no more with me"? I, instantly and shortly,

felt ashamed about the way I was thinking. He stunned me how he could know what I was thinking. After a few moments of formidable silence, I answered, “live to learn better what your purpose is. Life gives us hundreds and thousands of opportunities for learning. It is up to us how we avail them. This should be our only objective in the world: live to learn and learn to love”. Every one, man or woman, in every day of our lives, has a sensible opportunity to love. Life is not a place of recreation, but an unceasing process of learning. The process only ends when someone starts loving insanely. Once you start loving someone it’s hard to stop. “Except nothing in life from others, you will never be disappointed”. He said this and then again became thoughtful and fell into silence. He had been pining away in the pangs of unrequited love since ages.

Love is like a storm because its harms become obvious when it has gone. Love takes birth when things seem to go just contrary and your mind blatantly disapproves. Generally love takes eternal dwelling in highly aspiring people who, all the time, wait for those circumstances which may be promising to them. Those who have more capacity of power of thoughts, become more aggressive. Highly loving person loses the powers of patience, wit and courage. The same condition was prevailing on my friend’s mind. He too had lost all hopes, patience and courage to face harsh reality of life.

Despite his best behavior, kindness, and praiseworthy courtesy, he had lost his all best qualities in a moment when the flame of separation began to come out from him. He was criticized so much that he had lost good relations and best friends in a moment. He often confessed that he became reclusive in a moment but he did not have any ill will against any one. But his this statement did not lessen the prejudices which people had developed for him due to his this state of mind. Who was the responsible of his this condition he never pronounced it, no matter what; however everybody was acquainted with.

“Love is a blaze in which the person himself burns, though he blames situations and persons for it. When a person alters into flames of love he injures himself only”. I often tried to reproach him sharply, but always of no avail. I tried to realize that he had made the situation more complex. He could solve all complications easily with his smiling face but now; the situation had totally deteriorated day by day.

“Be thankful what you have. You have no idea how many people would love to have what you have got. Be proud of who you are, and not ashamed of how others see you. Should you care about what others think about you?” I said this and pushed him up. “Sometimes you have to lose yourself to find out who you are! He stood up saying these words with calmness that comes before an impending terrible storm. “My God, can’t you stay away from these philosophical maxims”. I respond without knowing the depth of his situation and carried on saying. “I want to say in this state because my thoughts are returning”. He tried to make me understand. “It is not that any more, he said, “just leave me alone, please. I will be fine in a little while”. He pretended not to care but he was screaming inside. He thanked me for my comforting words.

He would like to explain that he never wanted what he experienced up there to end. But it was over, and he had no obligation to sit there explaining anything to anyone. He walked away to sit far away, more near the stream. I had no choice. The only thing I could do was leave him alone

and last time I politely requested “We should go back to home because it’s freezing cold”. He said, “No I’m fine right here”. He didn’t need to explain what he said. I didn’t need to listen what I felt. I looked around him and left leaving him all alone.

A lot of people say time heals all wounds, but that is not true to a great extent. Apparently, time heals only the good things that we wish to hold on to forever. That was why the things he had read to lift his spirit didn’t stay with him for very long time. There was a hole in his soul that drained him of all positive energy, leaving behind only emptiness and loneliness in his life. He knew the hole well. He had lived with it for years and years. But he didn’t know how to escape its hold over him. He seemed only one solution of all his emptiness and loneliness and to escape this: that was suicide. For him, to commit suicide was to transform this slavery, emptiness and loneliness into freedom and peace of mind.

As I was moving, I heard him cry, “Dear God , of whom I think very little but in whom I trust the most in times of affliction, did I come here purely by chance? Or was it Your invisible and implacable hand that led me to this bank of the stream whose smooth rippling inviting me for internal peace, and reminding me of her”. No one could explain this. No one had heard anyone saying in this way. I had the premonition that something horrible was going to happen that was to change his world that night. Someone would lose something precious and exceptional. But I had no precise idea what it would be. We already had heard about people in other country sides dying of the cold. So I was too much curious about vulnerable fellow. Did he think everything he was going to do could be justified in the name of love? That was what I doubted at the moment and the crux of my problem.

I gave my overcoat, lest he should be got cold in this frosty night, but he politely turned down the offer. I still remember how we started talking, he trusted me with things he would have never trusted anyone else with. I gazed in his eyes, and for the last time I observed that there was something cracked behind them, like a little crack in a gem that becomes evident only when watched through a magnifying glasses; normally it is concealed by the radiance of the gem. I wanted to know what it was but said nothing further then I left him alone and I went towards home silently. Because the intensity of his emotions did not permit me to indulge him into further conversation.

Before I went to bed to sleep I could not help thinking about him. What the hell he was going to do? I poured a glass of beverage, took a sip but I couldn’t take in. I rested my head on the soft pillow which felt like a rock. For the first time I found it difficult to sleep after trying too much. I was afraid he would do something stupid and daring but I couldn’t do anything. I found myself more hapless than helpless. I just wanted to cry. Was that too much to do at the moment? But I couldn’t do anything. For the first time in my whole life I spent the night I had never spent before.

People often change after being hurt. Wisdom and experience cannot change the man. Time too does not change the man. The only thing that changes us is love. While I was on my bed, I understood that his love for her, who was a universe for him, was more precious than anything in the world, even his own life.

Next morning I got up early wee hours unusually, went straight to the place where I had left him sitting, lost in thoughts unsaid, thinking about impending hazard. I saw the leaves falling, their shapes silhouetted against the sun. The same thing was happening inside me: with every step I took, another became too difficult and too heavy to be taken. With every step, I kept thinking about what I should say when I got there. I was thinking about the last words what had been conversed last night between us. The only few more steps. My heart had cleft apart and tears blurred everything, after approaching to the sight. The sight of my friend, stretched upon road side with that wet notebook, shielded with white cloth, surrounded by many people, moved me to tears. It was the most affecting sight I had ever seen. I slammed my eyes vehemently. For the first time in my life it occurred to me as though he had never been alive. He had gone to the place of a mysterious realm to which all the mortal souls went when they were departed. It was situated somewhere up in the sky, a little distance beyond the clouds.

I couldn't stop crying desperately. He would speak in such a way that others love to listen to him, he would listen in such a way that others love to speak to him. But, now, I was speechless. I had premonition that something worthy would lose, but never thought I would be Jawed, my close friend. He had found a tranquil place in the heavens that he could not find on earth. He had taken his own life by drowning in the stream. It was all over now. He had gone where he wanted to go, never to come back. I kept crying. I sit there for a half an hour, crying. Tears of agony washed my soul. Without him I was worthless. My friend had given me more intelligence and a completely new outlook on life.

I felt nothing. I thought nothing. I took the notebook, hurled it into the stream and set him free. Then galloped straight back into my car in a sorrowful crying out at the top of my voice and drove, not knowing precisely where I should go. No one was waiting for me at the end of the drive. And no one was here, too. He was the best I had ever had. I couldn't tell how much he had changed the way I view about life. A mood of melancholy had descended on me. I saw darkness everywhere. I had lost all hope.

No matter what he did, he always forgot to forget her. She too left him without teaching him how to live without her, how to forget to her, how to move on without her. If fear didn't exist, I'd run straight up to her, kill her and tell her that he loved you more than anything under the sun. He will never be here anymore, but I swear, he will love her for the rest of her. She was the last person he needed in last part of his life. But she was completely the wrong person to fall in love with. He badly needed someone who wouldn't give up on him, no matter how many times he messed up with. My wish for him is that his future life becomes all that he wanted it to be.

Finally, I realized that it was good for him that he had gone to the world where he could have eternal tranquility and peace. I realized that we did not choose our life; it was life that chose us. There is no point asking why life has reserved certain joys or grieves, we just accept them and carry on with them resignedly. I realized that some people spent years allowing the pressure to build up inside them without even noticing, and then one day some minute incident triggered the crisis that was mounting gradually in them.

I think I will miss Moni forever. Like the stars miss the sun in the morning skies. Good friends are like stars. You don't always see them, but you know they are always there. I wish I could just take his pain and make it all go away. The only thing I wanted was for him to be happy. Though he didn't cry, yet it hurt agonizingly. Though he wouldn't say anything, yet he felt awfully. Though he didn't show, yet he cared silently. His words, that he uttered, still resonate in my mind relentlessly. "I'm okay. But, man be, I'm not. I'm not happy. But I'm not sad. Most of the time, I feel confused, ashamed and afraid. I guess I'm living but actually I'm not. I'm dead". He was absolutely right. He had already died since the very day they separated; though he was pathetically breathing. The only dissimilarity now was he was breathless.

"Let's go home buddy, now, instantly. It's almost about to dawn. We have spent another whole night together, where you lost your friend one year ago. I don't intend to lose mine in unusually frosty gusts of wind, which was piercing like needles through the body." Imran taps me on either shoulder with the blade of his hand strongly, brimming eyes with tears, to make me conscious and steers me back mutely towards home. He keeps on saying while walking, "Love means giving someone the chance to perish your life, but trusting them not to. Love is the most powerful and hazardous of any emotions and the only one of which you have absolutely no control. I wish to love someone whose heart has been smashed violently so that they know exactly how it feels and won't break mine".

I find myself wishing during the course of the night that Jawed were here! I wonder what had become of my poor fellow. I cannot forget him; he was very much a part of my life.

The End